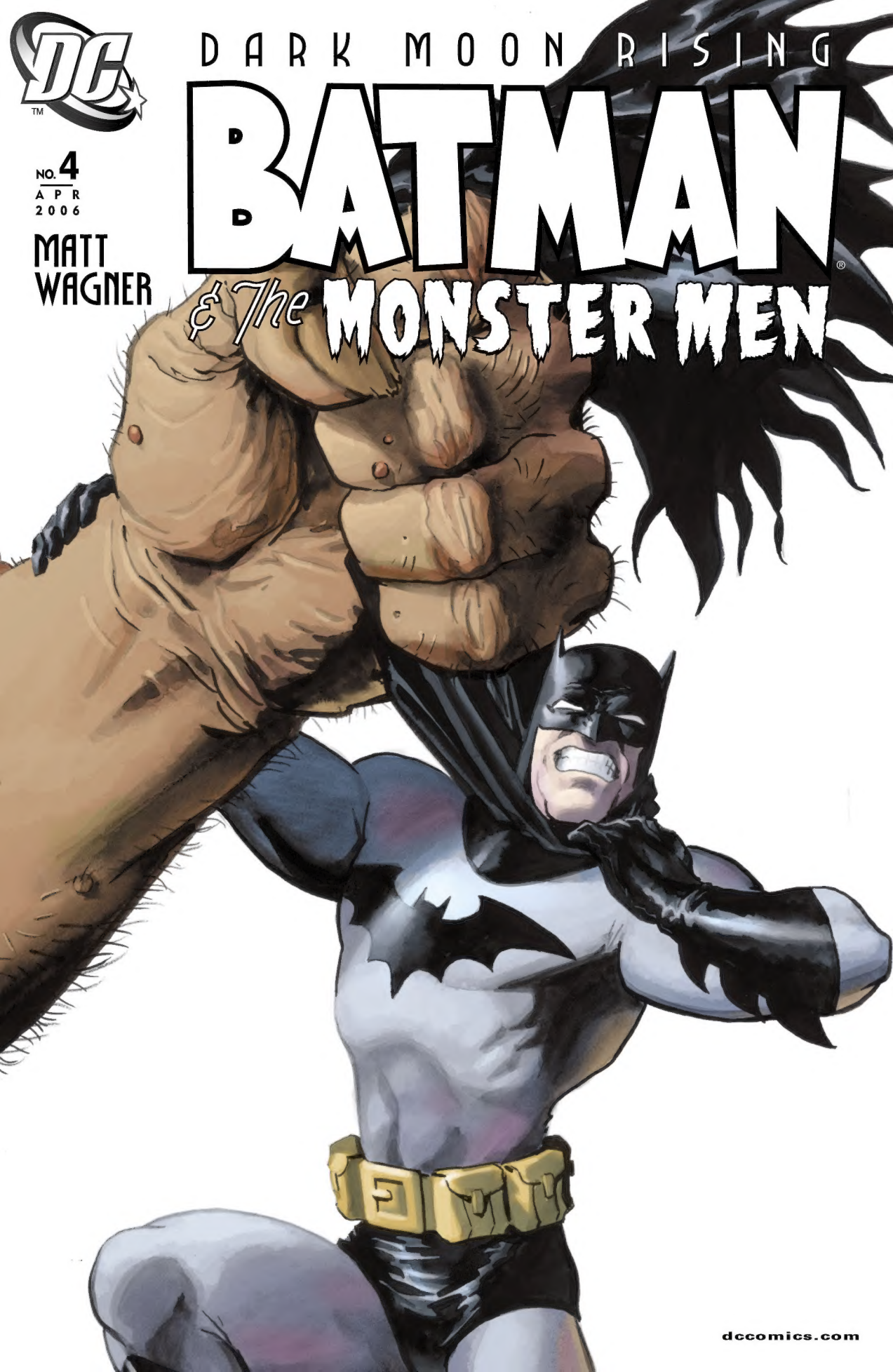
DC
DARK MOON RISING
BATMAN
& The MONSTER MEN
NO. 4
APR
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MATT
WAGNER
dccomics.com

INSIDE THE MONSTERS' DEN...
...THIS... CAPED CRUSADER EXHIBITS NOT A TRACE OF FEAR.
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·EDITOR·
BATMAN CREATED BY
BOB KANE

EVER GREEDY, #2 LUNGES FOR WHAT HE HAS COME TO EXPECT AS AN ALL-TOO-EASY VICTIM.

FASTER AND BETTER FED, #3 BEATS HIM TO IT.

EVER CONFUSED, #1 AGAIN WATCHES HIS BROTHERS FIGHT OVER FOOD.

THE BAT-MAN WEARS A PARAMILITARY BELT OF SOME SORT.

STOCKED WITH WEAPONS AND WHO KNOWS WHAT ELSE?!

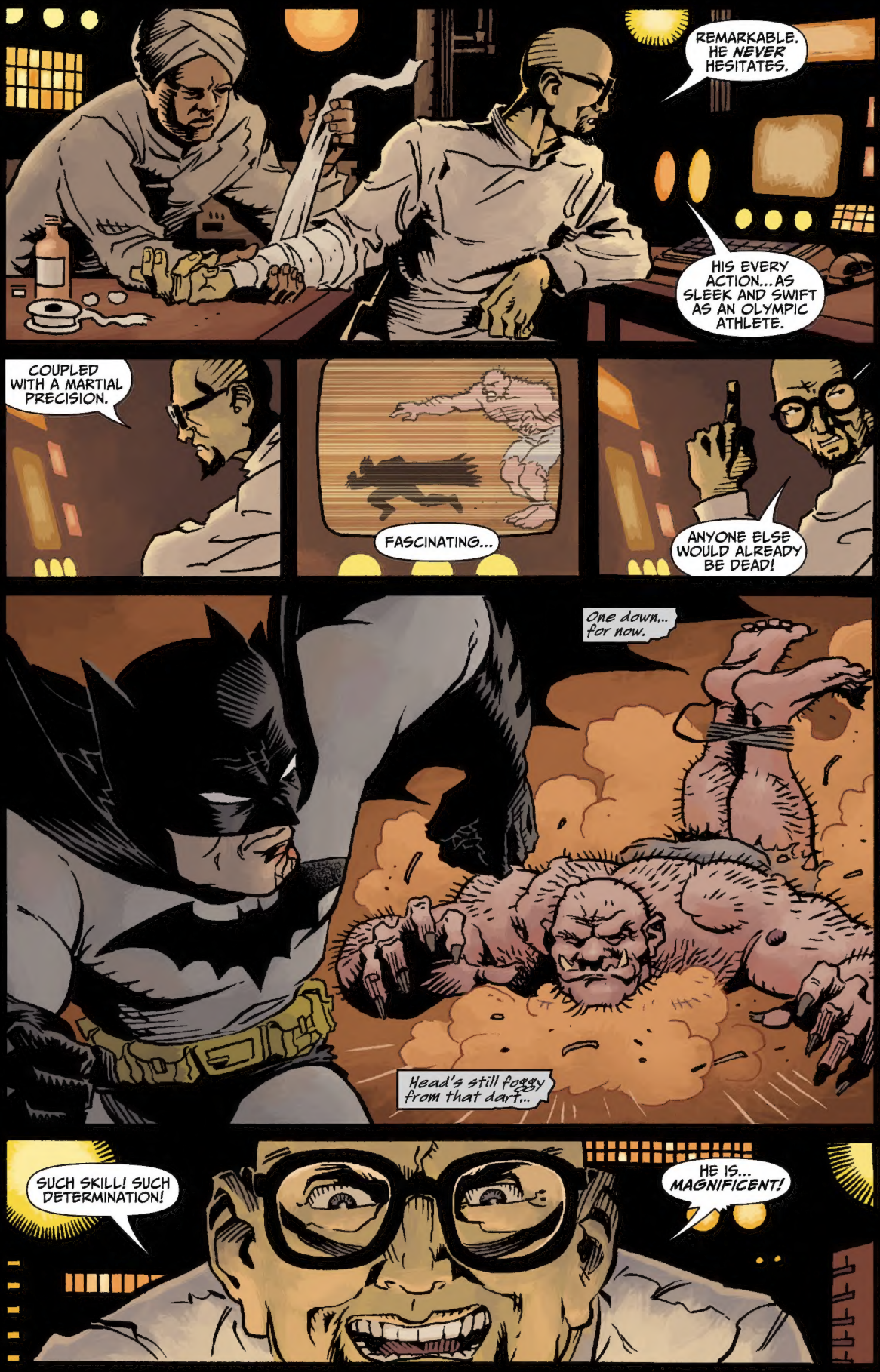
CHOK

AAYYGGH--

RRRAGNH!

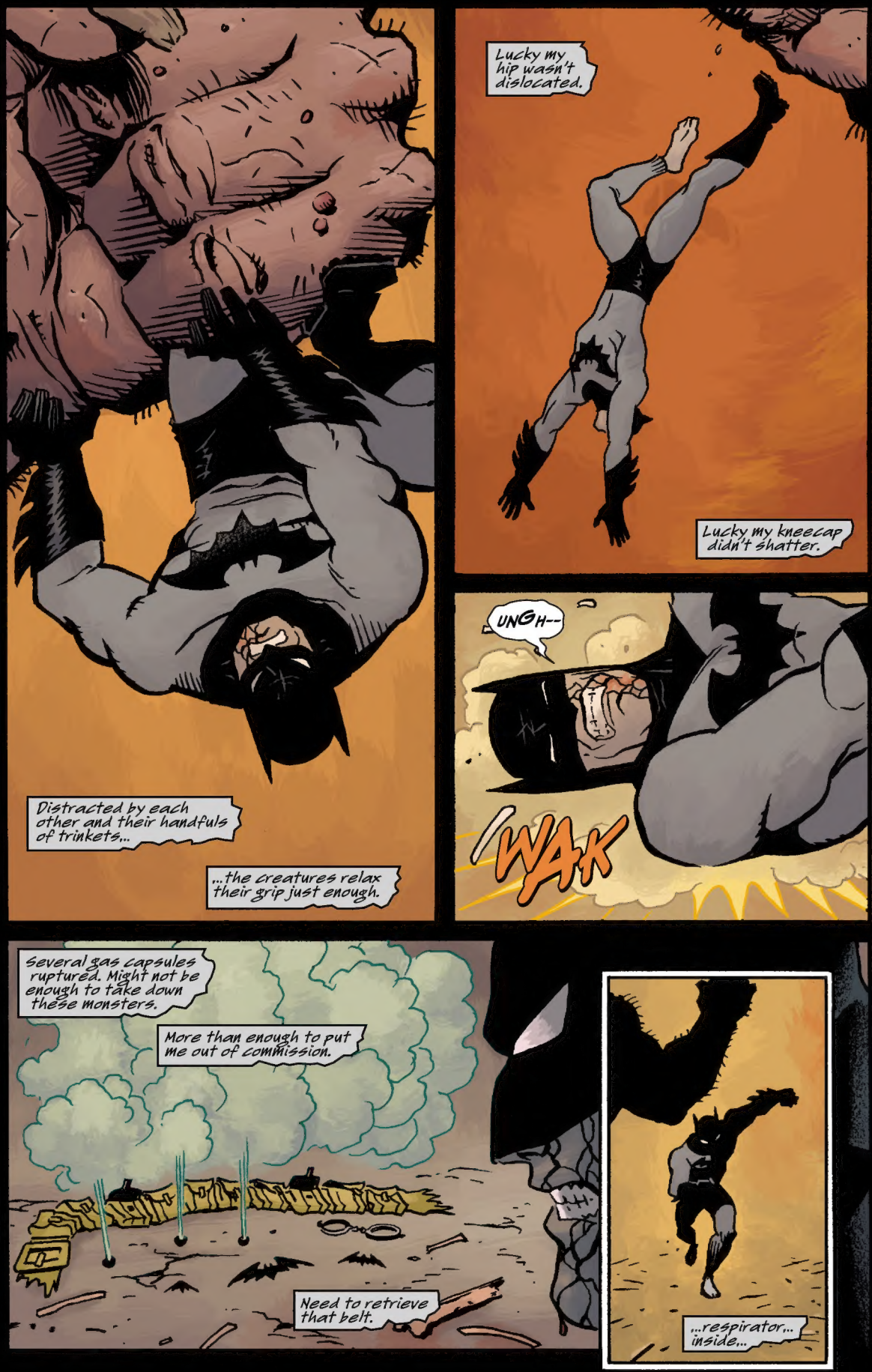
WAK

The creatures are surprisingly swift for their size.
THUK
YyEAARGG!!
But, like any giant, their joints most likely suffer from excess stress.
I put everything I've got into the slowest one's knee.
Like kicking a steel girder.
RNNPH--?
This line SHOULD hold up to 500 pounds of resistance.

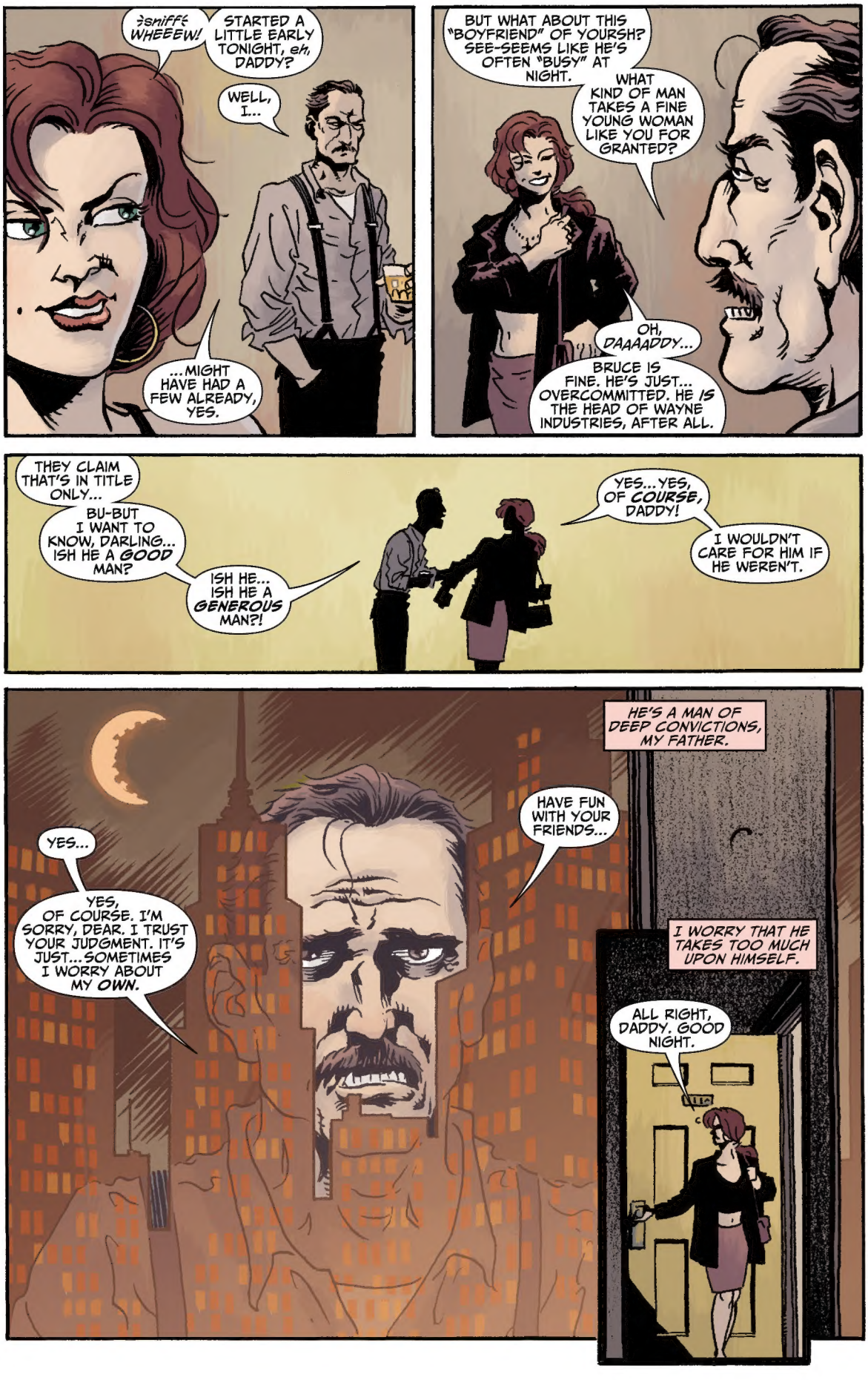

REMARKABLE. HE NEVER HESITATES.
HIS EVERY ACTION... AS SLEEK AND SWIFT AS AN OLYMPIC ATHLETE.
COUPLED WITH A MARTIAL PRECISION.
FASCINATING...
ANYONE ELSE WOULD ALREADY BE DEAD!
One down... for now.
Head's still foggy from that dart...
SUCH SKILL! SUCH DETERMINATION!
HE IS... MAGNIFICENT!

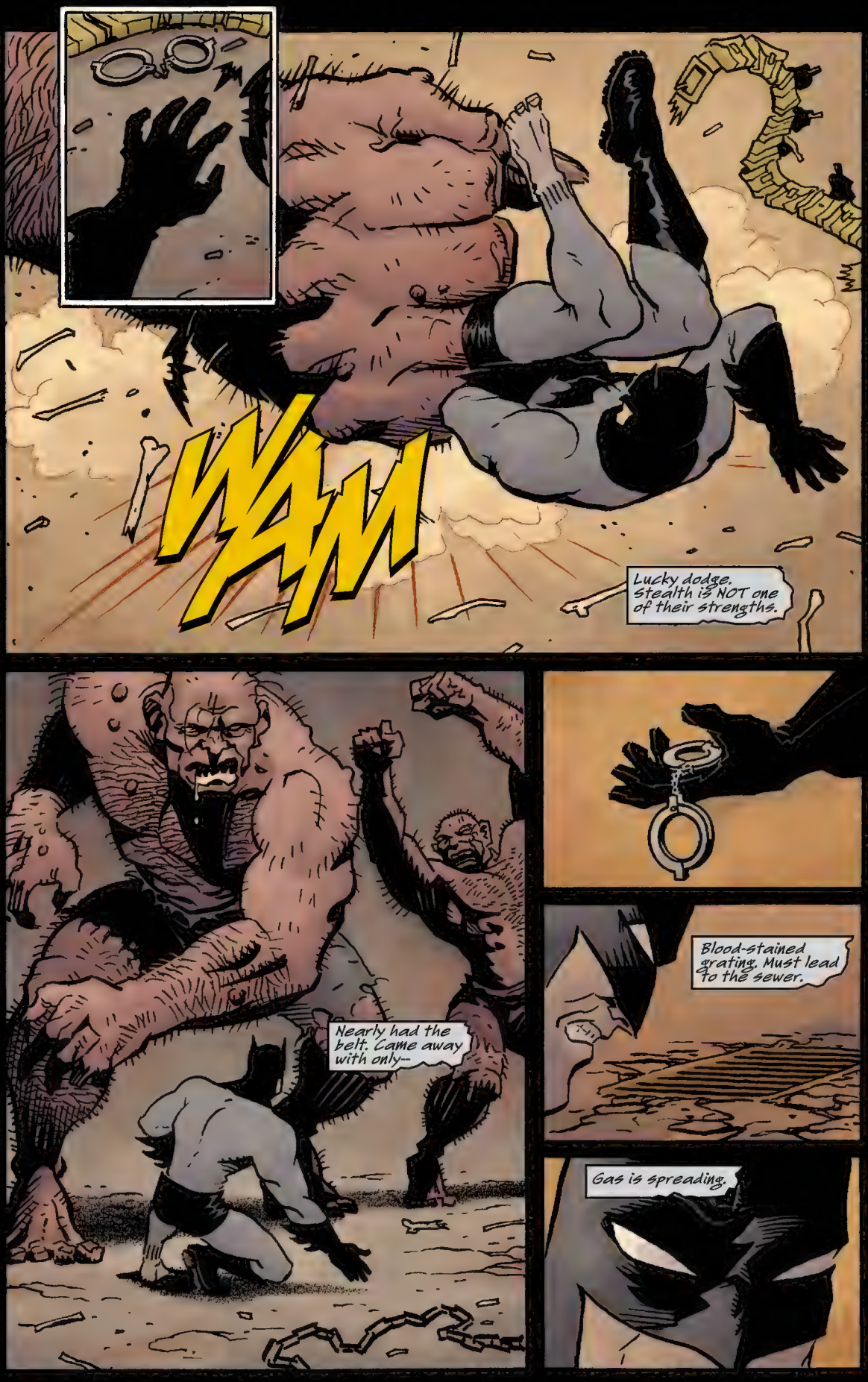
THUDDD
Too slow... the drug...
Felt a rib crack...
Can't afford a concussion.
Concentrate.
Ignore the pain...
GGLGH--
The cape...
gasp
RRRNNGH...
...useless against an opponent who can't be scared.

RRAAAGGH!
AARRRHGG!
RRRIIIPP
RRAAAGGH!
SNAP
GHAH!
SNIFF
SNIFF


Distracted by each other and their handfuls of trinkets...
...the creatures relax their grip just enough.
Lucky my hip wasn't dislocated.
Lucky my kneecap didn't shatter.
UNGH--
WAK
several gas capsules ruptured. Might not be enough to take down these monsters.
More than enough to put me out of commission.
Need to retrieve that belt.
...respirator... inside...

SHE HAS HER MOTHER'S EYES. AND HER SMILE.
AND MY OWN STUBBORN WILL.
GOD HELP ME IF ANYTHING EVER HAPPENED TO HER.
OH!
H'LLO, DARLING. I DIN'T KNOW... HOW WAS YER CLASSH... WURERYOU HEADED THISH EV'NING?
I SH'POSE IT'S THAT WAYNE, AGAINNN...
'FRAID NOT, DADDY.
BRUCE IS ALL BENT OUT OF SHAPE ABOUT SOME BUSINESS DEAL HE'S GOT GOING ON. TOO BUSY TO THINK ABOUT ME, I GUESS.
SO, I'M OFF FOR AN EVENING WITH SHARON AND CRYSTAL. GIRLS' NIGHT OUT!
DEVIL CLAIM ME IF I WERE EVER THE CAUSE.
DON'T WAIT UP FOR ME, OKAY?
HOW COULD HE BE TOO BUSY FOR YOU?
DADDY'S SEEMED PREOCCUPIED LATELY, TOO.
ALL THE MEN IN MY LIFE ARE SO... COMPULSIVE.


:sniff: WHEEEW!
STARTED A LITTLE EARLY TONIGHT, eh, DADDY?
WELL, I...
...MIGHT HAVE HAD A FEW ALREADY, YES.
BUT WHAT ABOUT THIS "BOYFRIEND" OF YOURSH? SEE-SEEMS LIKE HE'S OFTEN "BUSY" AT NIGHT.
WHAT KIND OF MAN TAKES A FINE YOUNG WOMAN LIKE YOU FOR GRANTED?
OH, DAAAADDY...
BRUCE IS FINE. HE'S JUST... OVERCOMMITTED. HE *IS* THE HEAD OF WAYNE INDUSTRIES, AFTER ALL.
THEY CLAIM THAT'S IN TITLE ONLY...
BU-BUT I WANT TO KNOW, DARLING... ISH HE A *GOOD* MAN?
ISH HE... ISH HE A *GENEROUS* MAN?!
YES...YES, OF *COURSE*, DADDY!
I WOULDN'T CARE FOR HIM IF HE WEREN'T.
HE'S A MAN OF DEEP CONVICTIONS, MY FATHER.
HAVE FUN WITH YOUR FRIENDS...
YES...
YES, OF COURSE. I'M SORRY, DEAR. I TRUST YOUR JUDGMENT. IT'S JUST...SOMETIMES I WORRY ABOUT MY *OWN*.
I WORRY THAT HE TAKES TOO MUCH UPON HIMSELF.
ALL RIGHT, DADDY. GOOD NIGHT.

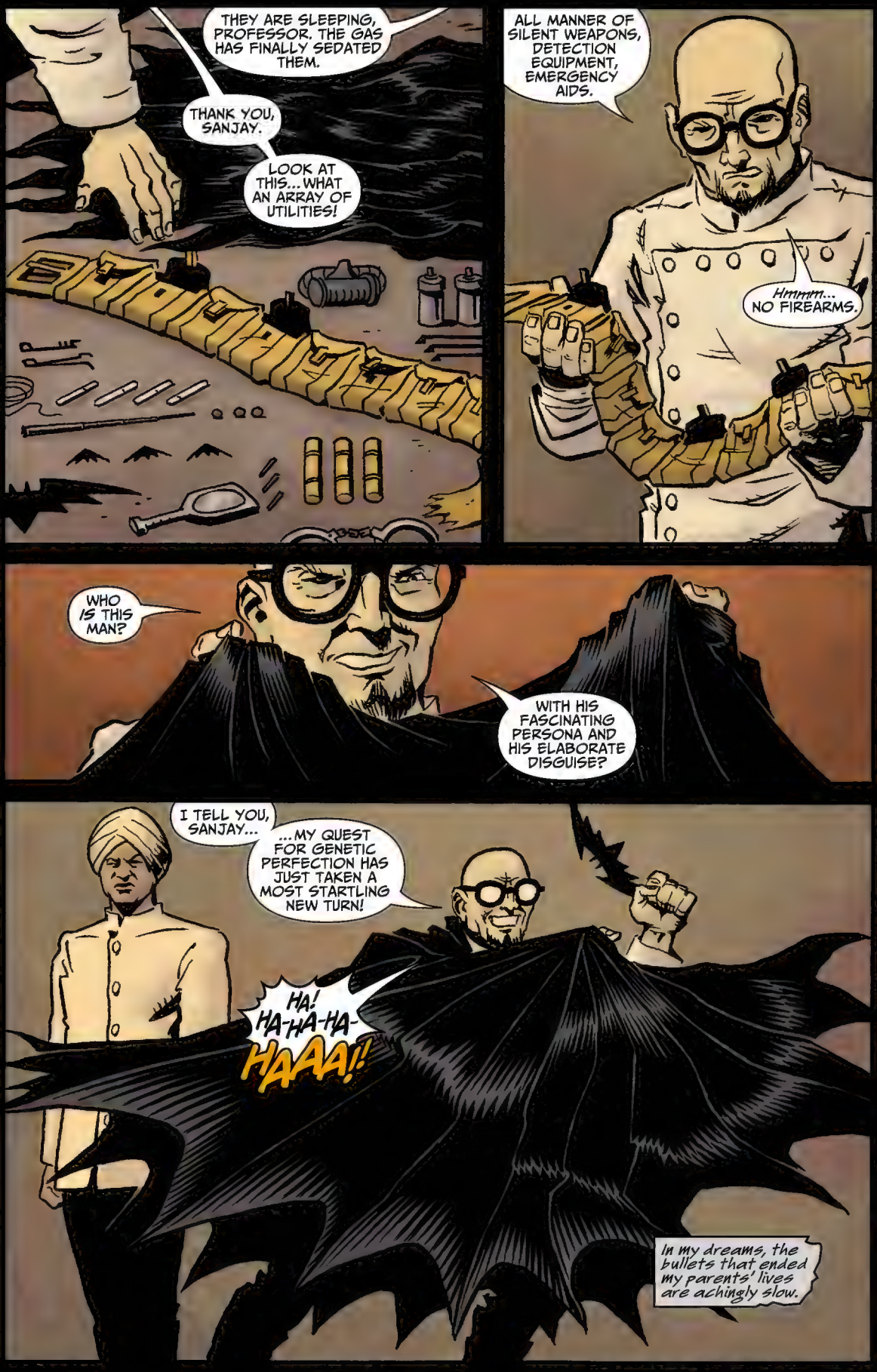

WAM
Lucky dodge. Stealth is NOT one of their strengths.
Nearly had the belt. Came away with only--
Blood-stained grating. Must lead to the sewer.
Gas is spreading.

RNHH--?
AAKGGH!
NUUGH!
CLICH
KRUNK

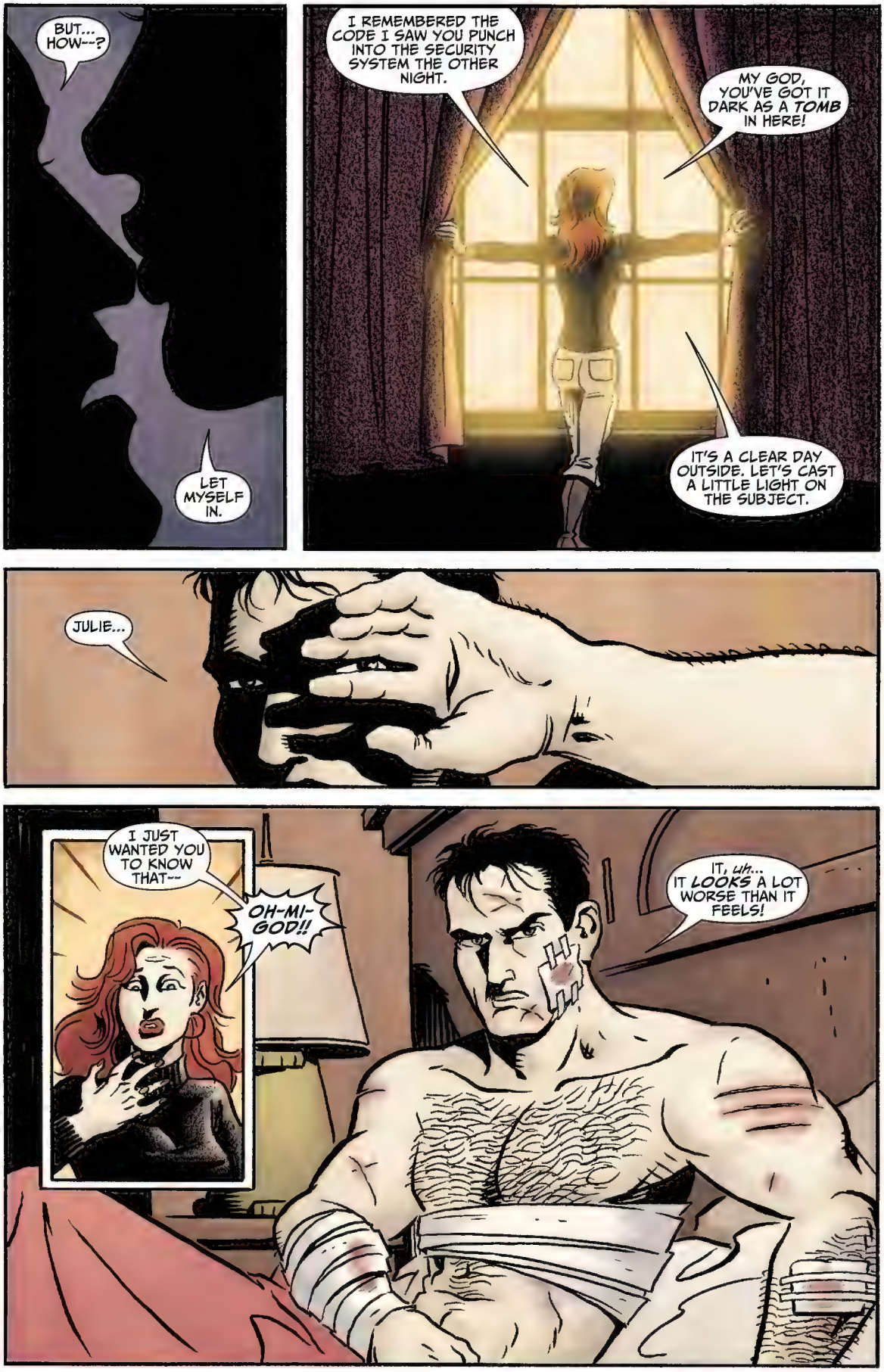
Felt another rib go.
Harder to...
...ignore the pain.
MUST get out of here.
CHANK
NARRGH! NARGGH!
Have to... stay clear...
...until... tethered one...
RAAAGH!
SKRONK

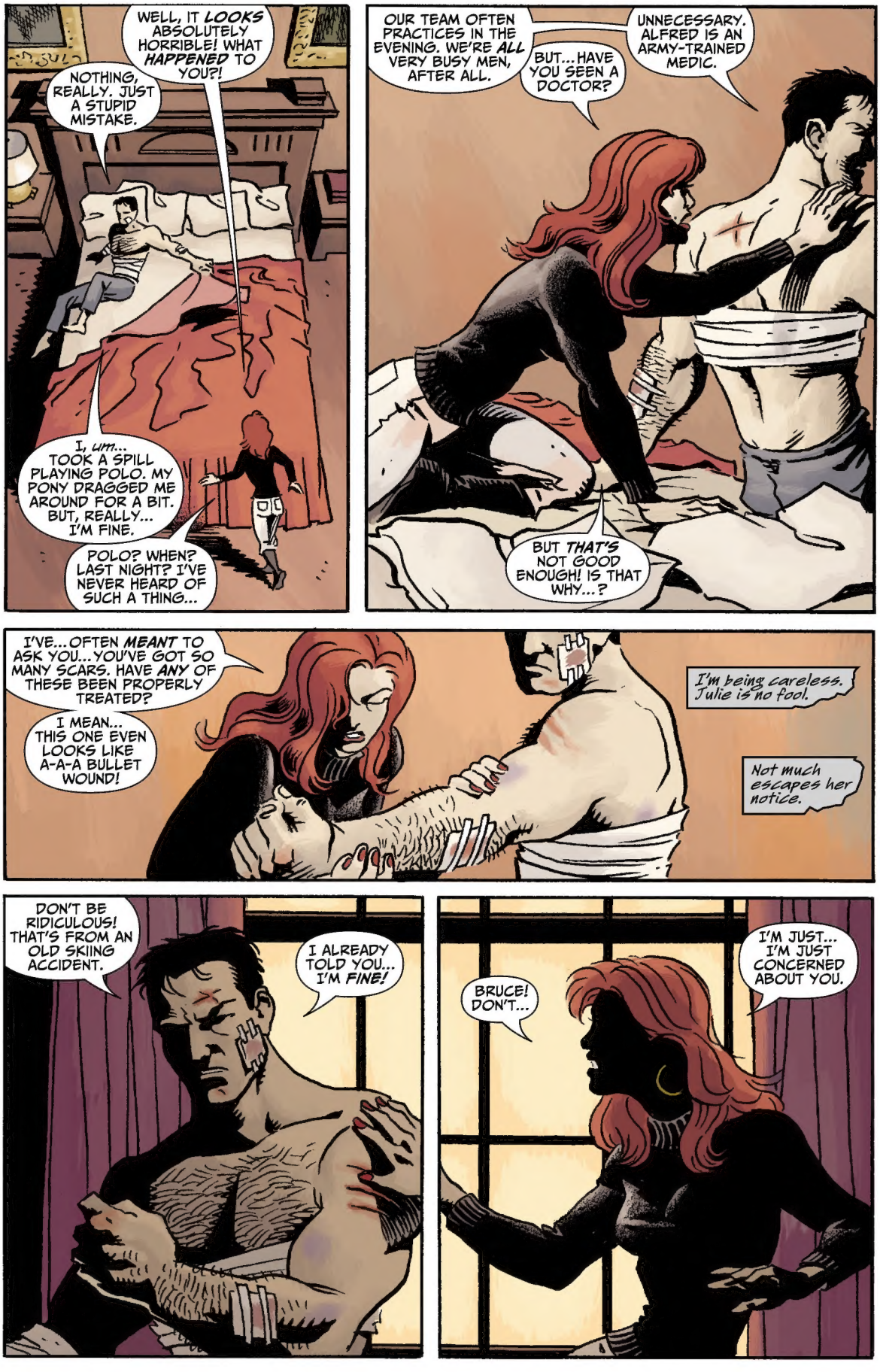
Ignore the pain...
Go.
Go.
Go.
RRGNNH--?
DID YOU SEE THAT, SANJAY? DID YOU?
HE ESCAPED!
HE ESCAPED USING ONLY A PAIR OF... HANDCUFFS!

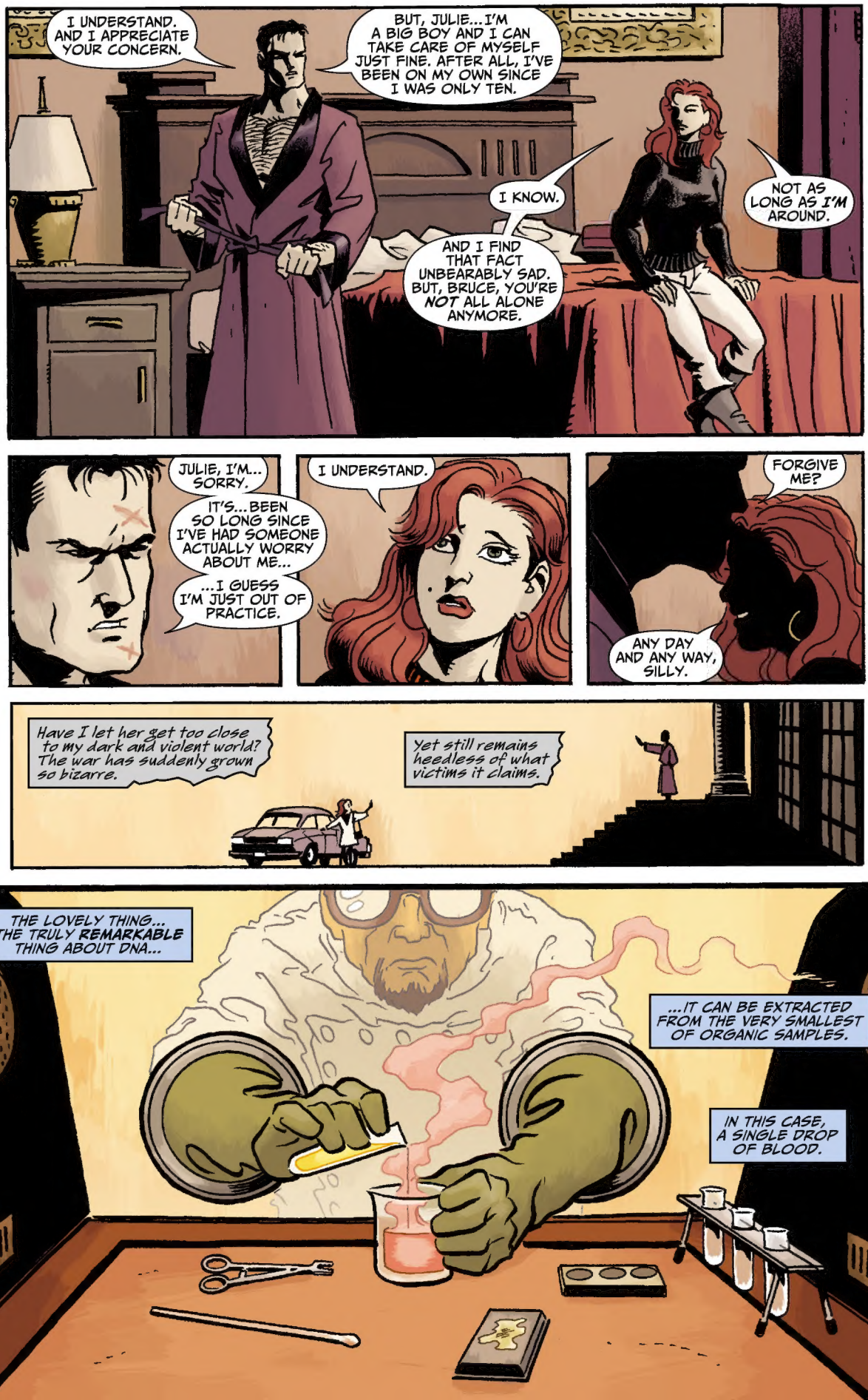
JUST IMAGINE WHAT ONE COULD DO WITH THE DNA OF SUCH A MAN!!
Strange has created genetic monsters out of human guinea pigs.
Like nothing I have ever encountered.
Like nothing I have ever imagined.
What drives a man to such twisted ends?
SPASSH
And to what wicked lengths will he go before he is stopped?

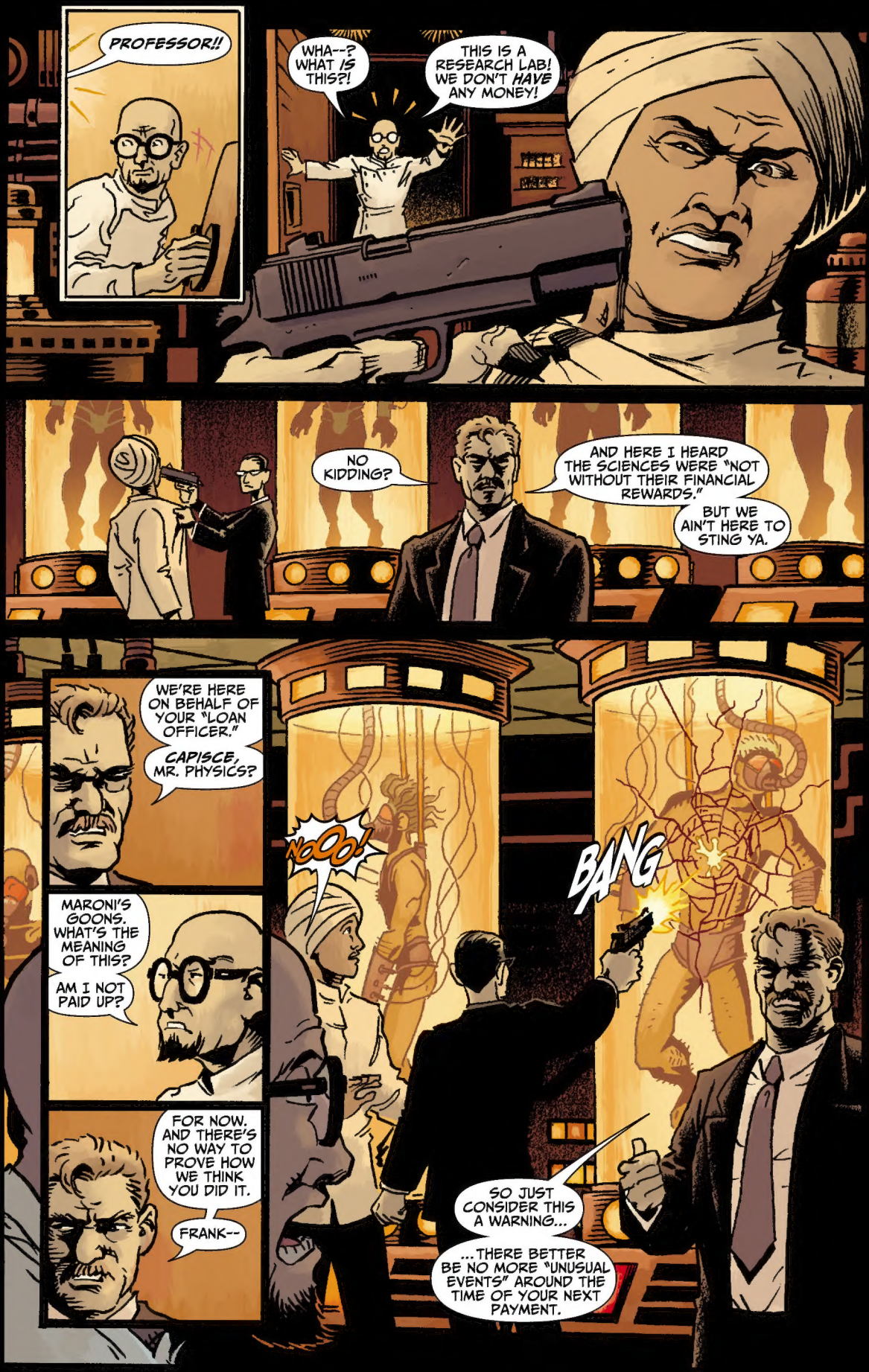

THEY ARE SLEEPING, PROFESSOR. THE GAS HAS FINALLY SEDATED THEM.
THANK YOU, SANJAY.
LOOK AT THIS... WHAT AN ARRAY OF UTILITIES!
ALL MANNER OF SILENT WEAPONS, DETECTION EQUIPMENT, EMERGENCY AIDS.
Hmmm... NO FIREARMS.
WHO IS THIS MAN?
WITH HIS FASCINATING PERSONA AND HIS ELABORATE DISGUISE?
I TELL YOU, SANJAY...
...MY QUEST FOR GENETIC PERFECTION HAS JUST TAKEN A MOST STARTLING NEW TURN!
HA! HA-HA-HA- HAAA!!
In my dreams, the bullets that ended my parents' lives are achingly slow.

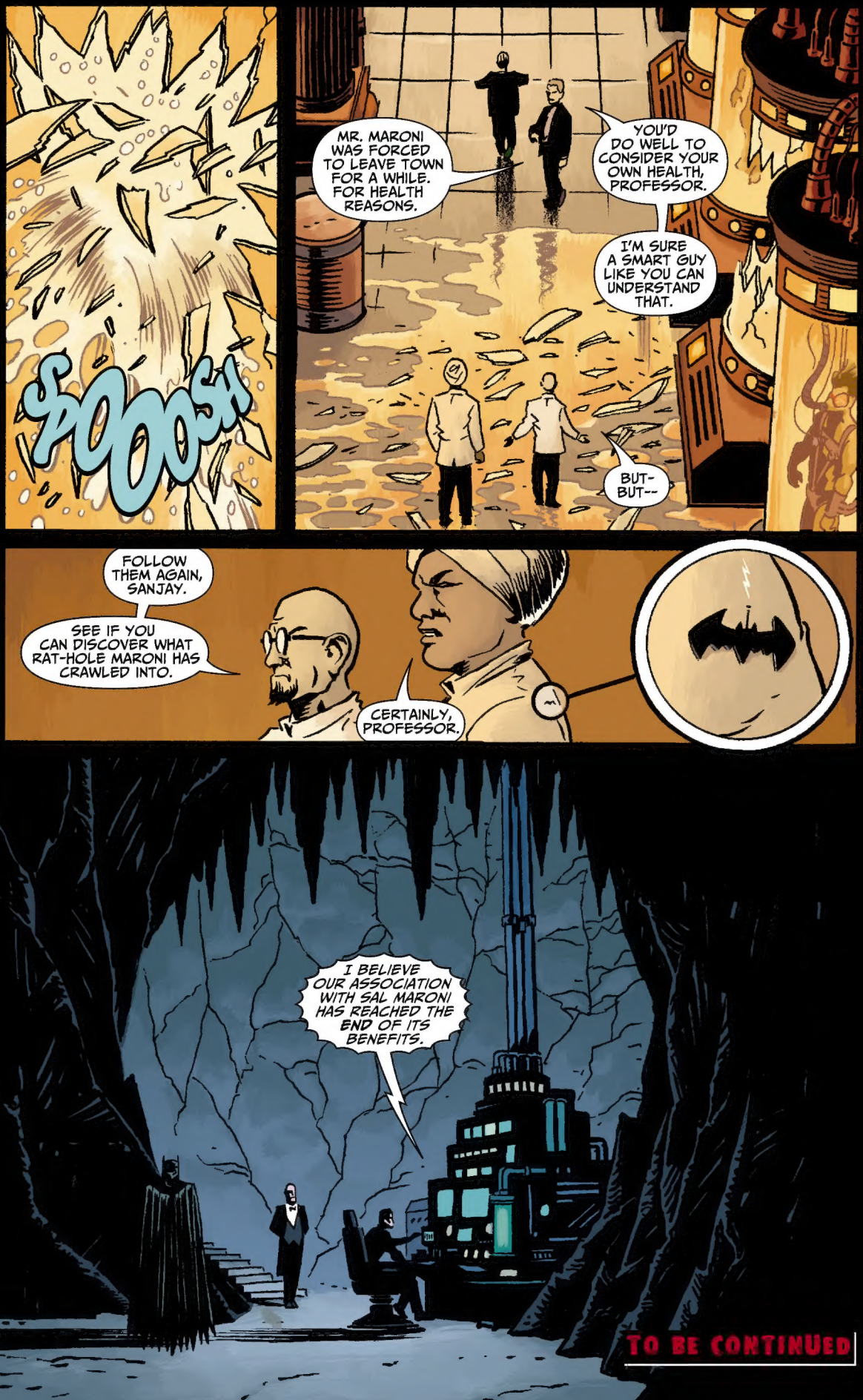
They spin, lazy and sluggish, as through wet concrete.
BRUUUUCE...?
And I run to catch them.
BRUUUUCE...?
Through it all, I can hear my mother screaming for me to come back.
WAKE UP, SLEEPYHEAD! YOU GONNA STAY IN BED ALL DAY?
}g'iggle{ WITHOUT ME?!
WHA--?!
JULIE?! WH-WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
JUST CHECKING IN ON MY OVERWORKED, STRESSED-OUT SWEETIE.
I'VE GOT A BRIEF I HAVE TO DELIVER THIS AFTERNOON, AND I JUST DROPPED BY TO SEE HOW YOU'RE DOING.
BUT... HOW'D YOU GET IN? ALFRED--
I ASSUME HE'S RUNNING ERRANDS. I PASSED HIM IN THE LIMO ON MY WAY OUT HERE.


BUT... HOW---?
LET MYSELF IN.
I REMEMBERED THE CODE I SAW YOU PUNCH INTO THE SECURITY SYSTEM THE OTHER NIGHT.
MY GOD, YOU'VE GOT IT DARK AS A TOMB IN HERE!
IT'S A CLEAR DAY OUTSIDE. LET'S CAST A LITTLE LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT.
JULIE...
I JUST WANTED YOU TO KNOW THAT--
OH-MI-GOD!!
IT, uh... IT LOOKS A LOT WORSE THAN IT FEELS!


WELL, IT LOOKS ABSOLUTELY HORRIBLE! WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?!
NOTHING, REALLY. JUST A STUPID MISTAKE.
I, um... TOOK A SPILL PLAYING POLO. MY PONY DRAGGED ME AROUND FOR A BIT. BUT, REALLY... I'M FINE.
POLO? WHEN? LAST NIGHT? I'VE NEVER HEARD OF SUCH A THING...
OUR TEAM OFTEN PRACTICES IN THE EVENING. WE'RE ALL VERY BUSY MEN, AFTER ALL.
BUT...HAVE YOU SEEN A DOCTOR?
UNNECESSARY. ALFRED IS AN ARMY-TRAINED MEDIC.
BUT THAT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH! IS THAT WHY...?
I'VE...OFTEN MEANT TO ASK YOU...YOU'VE GOT SO MANY SCARS. HAVE ANY OF THESE BEEN PROPERLY TREATED?
I MEAN... THIS ONE EVEN LOOKS LIKE A-A-A BULLET WOUND!
I'm being careless. Julie is no fool.
Not much escapes her notice.
DON'T BE RIDICULOUS! THAT'S FROM AN OLD SKIING ACCIDENT.
I ALREADY TOLD YOU... I'M FINE!
BRUCE! DON'T...
I'M JUST... I'M JUST CONCERNED ABOUT YOU.


I UNDERSTAND. AND I APPRECIATE YOUR CONCERN.
BUT, JULIE... I'M A BIG BOY AND I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF JUST FINE. AFTER ALL, I'VE BEEN ON MY OWN SINCE I WAS ONLY TEN.
I KNOW.
AND I FIND THAT FACT UNBEARABLY SAD. BUT, BRUCE, YOU'RE *NOT* ALL ALONE ANYMORE.
NOT AS LONG AS *I'M* AROUND.
JULIE, I'M... SORRY.
IT'S... BEEN SO LONG SINCE I'VE HAD SOMEONE ACTUALLY WORRY ABOUT ME...
...I GUESS I'M JUST OUT OF PRACTICE.
I UNDERSTAND.
FORGIVE ME?
ANY DAY AND ANY WAY, SILLY.
Have I let her get too close to my dark and violent world? The war has suddenly grown so bizarre.
Yet still remains heedless of what victims it claims.
*THE LOVELY THING... THE TRULY **REMARKABLE** THING ABOUT DNA...*
...IT CAN BE EXTRACTED FROM THE VERY SMALLEST OF ORGANIC SAMPLES.
IN THIS CASE, A SINGLE DROP OF BLOOD.


PROFESSOR!!
WHA--? WHAT IS THIS?!
THIS IS A RESEARCH LAB! WE DON'T HAVE ANY MONEY!
NO KIDDING?
AND HERE I HEARD THE SCIENCES WERE "NOT WITHOUT THEIR FINANCIAL REWARDS."
BUT WE AIN'T HERE TO STING YA.
WE'RE HERE ON BEHALF OF YOUR "LOAN OFFICER."
CAPISCE, MR. PHYSICS?
MARONI'S GOONS. WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS?
AM I NOT PAID UP?
FOR NOW. AND THERE'S NO WAY TO PROVE HOW WE THINK YOU DID IT.
FRANK--
NOOO!
BANG
SO JUST CONSIDER THIS A WARNING...
...THERE BETTER BE NO MORE "UNUSUAL EVENTS" AROUND THE TIME OF YOUR NEXT PAYMENT.


SPOOOSH
MR. MARONI WAS FORCED TO LEAVE TOWN FOR A WHILE. FOR HEALTH REASONS.
YOU'D DO WELL TO CONSIDER YOUR OWN HEALTH, PROFESSOR.
I'M SURE A SMART GUY LIKE YOU CAN UNDERSTAND THAT.
BUT- BUT--
FOLLOW THEM AGAIN, SANJAY.
SEE IF YOU CAN DISCOVER WHAT RAT-HOLE MARONI HAS CRAWLED INTO.
CERTAINLY, PROFESSOR.
I BELIEVE OUR ASSOCIATION WITH SAL MARONI HAS REACHED THE END OF ITS BENEFITS.
TO BE CONTINUED